

Last year the *San Antonio Express* ran the following blurb: "Two men in a bar in Godley, Texas argued about 'the hereafter' until one shot the other."

Last week the news clipping and a poem in my handwriting surfaced in my top dresser drawer on a postcard never posted. The poem reads:

"Oh Texas, Oh Texans, come from under the sun,
"Doff your hat; move to the shade of the undertaker's
tent.
"Join the bereaved, and unhook your gun belt, please.
"Come celebrate departure of a man gone to the
hereafter for a mistake in the near past."

Found a Godley, Texas, on the map, south and a tad west of Fort Worth close to Cresson, where the Big Boss wintered steers. Am not sure if it is the same place, or if such a place exists where the debate closed with gunfire. Scribes working in San Antonio are just as apt to make up a story as ones are in San Angelo — or San Francisco or San Miguel De Allende, for that matter.

Be clear right now that if a reader has more accurate information on Godley, Texas, don't impose the correction on my tab. The ranch is 22 miles from Mertzon and 18 miles from Barnhart. Other than those two locations on the globe, don't depend on me for the longitude or latitude of every jerkwater place in Texas, or verification of any or every nit-picking fact a big daily publishes in San Antonio.

Isolation and making deadlines for over 40 years breeds impatience and surliness of a degree that'd make Ivan the Terrible a star in the "Child's Garden of Verses," so don't assume license to criticize my poetry or question my geography.

Before you strike, try first to be poetic in a land of springtimes so hard that caterpillars metamorphose into ugly slugs instead of beautiful butterflies. Then try to pass a course in geography based in a burg like Mertzon with no bus service and a train that runs once a month.

I think I once wrote of another old troll like myself who ran the movie projector at the Texas Theater in Angelo in the way-gone times of changing reels. Age made him cranky, too. At the interruptions, kids began whistling and making insulting sounds. Old Bill, or Buster, or whatever the name, would poke his head out the projection window, high above the audience, to deliver a string of heated deprecations of origin and birthright potent enough to shock a taxi driver.

Old Buster, as I have decided was his name, was all the youth counseling and evaluation available in all of the shortgrass country. He talked — or yelled — at us like we were adults. Taught us to be straightforward; spiced our vocabularies; sidestepped and obliterated all that gooey stuff about, "I bet your little mother is sure proud of you."

There was no chance of the mothers being offended by Buster's outbursts. In the Big Depression of the Thirties,

a 10-cent ticket to a double feature on Saturday afternoon lightened the burden of many a mom's heart, knowing her redheaded, rusty-hided boy's freckles were concealed by the darkness of a theater for at least the length of two Western movies.

Every Mother's Day, the flashback occurs of stalwart ministers mounting the pulpit in hot church houses on a May morning to encourage mothers to face reality, to stop hiding their babies under swaddling blankets, or reverse the hoods to cover the little tots' faces. (May be off-target a bit here using "swaddling blankets" instead of "swaddling clothes." Also, might explain why so many kids were wheezed from masking and covering our faces in fuzzy blankets and flannel hoods.)

Can hear the preacher better than see the old scene, as someone was always pulling a hat or cap brim over our little faces. And about that "swaddling clothes" bit: if wrapping an infant in narrow strips like bandages applies in other cultures as well as to us, those Depression mothers swaddled us so tight it'd make a drum major's cap seem loose as wearing a wash basin for a hat and using a rubber band for a chin strap.

But whether the shooting happened in Godley, Texas, or happened at all, please address the service the press gives citizens, arousing and supporting skepticism and doubting the printed word. I'd never have started writing these articles if I'd had to write the truth. Would have ruined the whole show. It would have been like trying to introduce

a code of ethics in an old-time domino hall. Do hope that's clear.